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THE KEYSTONE PROJECT: TRAINING WATERSHED PROFESSIONALS THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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The Center for Watershed Stewardship has developed a curriculum that supports graduate-level water resource education, promoting team-oriented, interdisciplinary problem solving. The purpose of the Watershed Stewardship Option is to educate a new type of professional able to work in an interdisciplinary fashion in a team setting to craft creative solutions to complex water resource issues. We educate professionals who can integrate science with design, and planning with management. Most importantly, each student gains “real-world” practical experience in the context of local, community-directed watershed planning and management. This hands-on learning takes place through a two-semester “Keystone Project” conducted in partnership with nonprofit organizations, government at multiple levels, and economic and business interests. Graduate students work with the community to identify and evaluate problems in their watershed. Public presentations by the students outline problems and solutions, which are then presented in an extensive report. This curriculum is unique among graduate water resources programs in its interdisciplinary approach to experiential case problem solving. We will present the challenges and opportunities that have arisen from this experiential curriculum and describe the benefits gained by the students as a result of their significant investment of time and energy above and beyond the typical graduate degree.